

LUCREZIA MARINELLI
AND WOMAN'S IDENTITY IN
LATE ITALIAN RENAISSANCE

by

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In this paper the Italian Humanist Lucrezia Marinelli (1571-1653) will be examined from the two complement perspectives of her place in late Italian Renaissance Studies and her contribution to the philosophy of woman.¹ Marinelli is extraordinary in both areas of intellectual history; her relatively unknown contributions make it even more exciting to bring forward to the English speaking public this assessment of her work. In Part I of this paper, Filippo Salvatore, Department of Modern Languages and author of Antichi e Moderni in Italia nel Seicento will examine her writing as an epic poet in the first part of the seventeenth century; in Part II Sr. Prudence Allen, RSM, Ph.D., Department of Philosophy and author of The Concept of Woman: The Aristotelian Revolution (750BC-1250 AD) will examine her significance as a philosopher of the concept of woman at this crucial turning point in western intellectual history; and in Part III Filippo Salvatore will underline Marinelli's significance as a political thinker.

I

The life and works of Lucrezia Marinelli Vacca

In the history of social and intellectual emancipation of women in European culture Lucrezia Marinelli deserves a prominent position. Besides Christine de Pisan and Isabella d'Este, who preceded her, Marinelli is one of the outstanding figures of learned women in the second part of the 16th century and the first part of the 17th. She was born in fact in Venice in 1571 and died in the same city in 1653. Chronologically speaking she belongs to

the Counter-Reformation period which traditionally has been considered as one the worst of Italian history because of the Spanish domination and the lack of political liberty and the strict censorship practised by the Catholic Church after the Council of Trent (1545-1563).

According to many critics the position of women in this period worsened particularly when compared with the freer atmosphere of the High Renaissance . Ladies such as Isabella d'Este at Ferrara or Elisabetta Gonzaga at Urbino played a significant role in the cultural and even political domain during the High Renaissance. The relative freedom enjoyed by women belonging to the middle and upper classes came under attack and in its stead misogynous writings flourished. A scholar like Ginevra Conti Odorisio still adheres to the widely held belief that " Seventeenth century misogyny is to be viewed within the general framework that emerged in Italy with the Counter Reformation...and a negative judgement, at least as far as women are concerned, cannot be modified. After the Council of Trent woman became in the hands of the Jesuits an instrument of spiritual and civic servility ". ²

An opposite, and more balanced, view is expressed by Natalia Costa-Zalessow who clarifies that " According to many critics the position of woman got worse, and as a result there are no outstanding woman writers. And yet, if one looks at things closer, one realizes that this view is not completely exact. In the last decade of the 16th century and in the 17th century, feminism became militant through the pen of Modesta da Pozzo, Lucrezia Marinelli

and Suor Arcangela (Elena) Tarabotti".³

Misogynous literature in this period is particularly violent and is centred on the inferiority of woman, both biologically and spiritually. Woman is seen as synonym of every possible sin and the embodiment of a devilish nature. One tragic pendant of this intolerant conception of womanhood is the persecution of women by means of witch hunts.

One of the most vicious attacks on women is the book Donneschi Diffetti by Giuseppe Passi published in Milan in 1595. It is precisely as a reply to Passi's book that in 1600 Lucrezia Marinelli prints her treatise divided into two parts entitled La Nobiltà et L'Eccellenza delle Donne Co'Diffetti Et Mancamenti De gli Huomini.⁴

Besides Lucrezia Marinelli other women writers such as Moderata Fonte, Arcangela Tarabotti and Sara Copia Sullam were active in Venice at the turn of the 17th century, which means that the queen of the Adriatic was one of the places in Europe where "feminist" literature sprang forth. Why Venice? Because Venice had been for centuries a place where a secular approach to life had been allowed to flourish and where a more democratic form of government existed if compared with the rest of Italy.⁵ The University of Padua was the only one in Italy that allowed Protestants like the Englishman Harvey to register, and it was at Padua that Pomponazzi and other Peripatetic philosophers dared to deny the immortality of the soul, Andreas Vesalius dared to dissect corpses and Galileo Galilei dared to defend in public the validity

of the heliocentric conception of the universe. Padua was, in other words, one of the few places in Catholic Europe where freedom of thought was allowed and where great strides forward were made in fields like medicine, philosophy and physics.⁶

This is the cultural and social background that has to be kept in mind if we are to understand how a woman like Lucrezia Marinelli was able to write and publish her treatise on the nobility of women and the faults of men which expounds a very provocative thesis: reverse sex polarity.

Let us turn at this point our attention to the life and the other works of this extraordinary person. Lucrezia Marinelli was, as mentioned, born in Venice in 1571. She was the daughter of the physician, philosopher and scholar Giovanni Marinelli originally from the city of Modena. She grew up in an environment where culture was highly praised. Her father was an admirer of Aristotle and assembled a rich collection of books which young Lucrezia, an intelligent and voracious reader with a precocious mind, had the leisure to consult without having to go out of the household. Lucrezia must have also been present at the frequent gatherings, so typical of the time, where literary, philosophical and medical topics were discussed.

Giovanni Marinelli had a keen interest in the condition of women and is the author of the Ornamenti delle donne (The ornaments of women) published in Venice in 1562 and of Le medicine pertinenti alle infermità delle donne (Drugs apt to remedy womanly sicknesses) published also in Venice in 1574.⁷ Lucrezia had a

brother Curzio who followed in his father's steps and became himself a physician. She was, according to the renowned humanist Sansovino, an avid learner and a great admirer of knowledge and used to spend whole days locked in her room to study. She began to write at around the age of twenty and had her first work La Colomba Sacra published in 1595. It is an heroic poem in ottava rima that tells in four cantos the life of the young and beautiful Christian Colomba who prefers to be a martyr rather than renege her faith and become the wife of the emperor Aurelian.⁸ She was a prolific writer and in the history of Italian and probably European literature is the most prominent woman writer of heroic and sacred poems. Two years later in 1597 she published in her native city Vita del serafico et glorioso san Francesco. Descritta in ottava rima da Lucrezia Marinella ove si spiegano le attioni, le astinenze & i miracoli di esso. Con un discorso del rivolgimento amoroso verso la somma bellezza. This biography of Saint Francis was afterwards included in the collection of the praises of Saint Francis edited by Father Silvestro da Poppi in 1606.⁹

Other works by Marinelli that deal with a religious topic are: La vita di Maria Vergine, imperatrice dell'universo, poema heroico, descritta in prosa e in ottava rima, published in Venice in 1602 and again in 1610 and 1617; Vita di Santa Giustina in ottava rima, 1606; Vita de' dodeci heroi di Christo et de'Quattro Evangelisti, Venice 1617; De gesti heroici e della vita meravigliosa della serafica S. Caterina da Siena, Venice 1624; Le vittorie di Francesco il serafico, Venice 1644; Rime Sacre, Venice

1603. She also wrote in ottava rima the summaries of the renowned poet Luigi Tansillo's Le lacrime di San Pietro, poema sacro con gli argomenti ed allegorie di Lucrezia Marinelli ed un discorso di Tommaso Costo, first published in Venice in 1606 and again in 1738.¹⁰

Lucrezia Marinelli dealt also with mythological and allegorical topics in her writings. In 1605 she published in Venice Arcadia Felice and in 1618 the poem in ottava rima in ten cantos Amore innamorato ed impazzato, poema con gli argomenti & allegorie à ciascun canto. This poem echoes at the beginning Ariosto's masterpiece Orlando Furioso and Angelo Poliziano's Stanze per la Giostra especially in the description of Iridio's hunt, a young man who does not care about love and whom Cupid wishes to wound. However, because of Jupiter's punishment, Love wounds himself and woes Ersilia.

At the end, Love repents and asks for Jupiter's forgiveness. Several of Marinelli's love poems are part of the collection Rime delle signore Lucrezia Marinelli, Veronica Gambara ed Isabella della Morra, con l'aggiunta di quella di Maria Selvaggia Borghini, published in Naples in 1693.

Lucrezia Marinelli's reputation and claim to fame rests on two other works of hers. The first is the treatise La Nobiltà e l'Eccellenza delle donne co' Diffetti et Mancamenti de gli Huomini which appeared for the first time in Venice in 1600 and was reprinted three more times with additions and corrections. It is a landmark at the European level both from a philosophical and

sociological point of view for it exemplifies a unique capacity for discursive reasoning and a keen understanding of the social forces that kept women in low esteem and in dire dependency on men. These are precisely the topics that will be discussed at some length in the second part of this essay.

The other work that brought her great reputation as a poet is Enrico ovvero Bisanzio acquistato, poema heroico, published for the first time in Venice in 1635 and a second in 1844 and a third, with Marinelli's portrait, in 1845.¹¹ Enrico is an impressive piece of literature; it is an epic poem in 27 cantos in ottava rima that tells in its author's own words: "the sublime and most noteworthy enterprise by Enrico Dandolo, a Venetian prince in the conquering and possession of the most famous City of Constantinople, as a result of which derived afterwards the subjection of the greater part of the Eastern empire."¹² The topic chosen, then, as it was customary after Torquato Tasso's Gerusalemme Liberata is based upon an historical event, Venice's conquest of Bysantium during the fourth crusade (1202-1204).¹³ The major characters, Dandolo himself, Baudoin Count of Franders, Boniface, Marquis of Monferrato, Louis, Count of Bles, and Isaac and Alexis Commenus, the legitimate heir and the usurper of the throne of Bysantium are real, but others like the valiant female warrior Claudia, the magician Eson and the knights Venier, Rainiero and Giacinto are the product of Marinelli's imagination. The combination of 'historia e favoloso' taken from the Christian tradition, rather than from the pagan mythology, is a precept to be found in Tasso's discourses on the

nature of the modern epic poem. From this point of view, therefore, Marinelli is a follower of Tasso, like the other great lady of early 17th century Italian letters Margherita Sarrocchi author of La Scanderbeide published in Rome in 1623, an epic poem that deals with the heroic resistance of George Castriota, surnamed because of his valour Scanderbeg (the Great Alexander) to the Turkish invasion of Albania in the late part of the 15th century.¹⁴ But Marinelli is also sharply aware of the theoretical debates on the nature of epic poetry expounded by Aristotle in his Poetics. In her letter to the readers of the Enrico she clarifies her stand:

I have, in order to render worthy of heroic majesty my poem, followed what Aristotle writes in his poetics, although I did not venture too far from Homer's teachings, for he was labelled as a living and true idea of heroic poetry. And if I imitated the moderns in some instances, one can see, if one analyzes the intent, that I took as true sources the Greek and Roman poetry, and will find out that *primis gratiae sunt habendae*.¹⁵

Moreover Marinelli points out that she developed only one major plot, even though some minor ones are linked indissolubly to it, in order to respect the canon of the diversity within unity Aristotle refers to when he mentions the metaphor of the animal perfect in each of its parts.

In the history of the emancipation of woman, as a result of her treatise on the Nobiltà et Eccellenza delle Donne Lucrezia Marinelli occupies an important position. She is much more important than the better known Dutch woman Anna Maria von Schurman or the French writer Mlle. Marie de Gournay, the adoptive daughter

of Montaigne. But what about Marinelli's worth as a poet? Does she deserve still the fame she enjoyed in her lifetime as a great poet? In the 1844 edition F.Z. points out that the reader will find in the Enrico

some sharp traits, appropriate comparisons, and sometimes prominence and worth in the plot. In a word he will notice that if Lucrezia had lived in a better age, her talent would have merited even in our times a conspicuous amount of praise.¹⁶

This view corresponds to the notion that 17th century Italy was a period of decadence and lack of artistic merit, especially in literature where Giambattista Marino had dazzled his contemporaries with his pompous style and frivolous themes.¹⁷ A completely different conclusion had reached Monsignor A. Della Chiesa, a contemporary of Marinelli, who stated that she:

was an admirable woman for her eloquence and wisdom, who in composing verses has risen so high that I believe there is no one that can match her.¹⁸

In the first part of this century the critical approach is more shaded. Belloni, a specialist of the baroque age in Italy, points out that "a woman may very well choose to sing glorious deeds of heroes for the spirit is lofty, even though the sex is imbecil".¹⁹ Benedetto Croce, the famous philosopher and literary critic who dealt at length with the Spanish presence in Italy and with the fatuous nature of baroque art, expresses a more nuanced view of both Sarrocchi and Marinelli as epic poets.

Sarrocchi was a correct writer who belonged to a good tradition; a hint of her literary

taste very little 'marinesco' is her comment to Della Casa's rhymes. But, the principal of the women writers of epic poems was the Venetian Lucrezia Marinelli who wrote Enrico, ovvero Bisanzio acquistato (1635). In general it has to be noticed that the women writers were rather conservative, and avoided almost completely using conceits and baroque argutezze, which seemed to require some kind of virility. If one cannot find in the works of 17th century female writers true poetry, one can, nonetheless, find movements and feminine voices and the expression of feelings, but it is rather rare to find even in them a spirit of real humanity.²⁰

Finally, a recent critic Costa-Zalessow has this to say about Marinelli's worth as a poet:

Lucrezia had an easygoing hand, but her verses are not very profound, even though they are correct and elegant. As I said she was the greatest writer of epic poems, but her art owes too much to her models: Poliziano, Ariosto, and above all Tasso. Nonetheless I have to admit that a serious study of her literary production is still lacking and ought to take into account the predominant taste of early Seicento and her own temperament as an emancipated woman.²¹

After having read much of Marinelli's literary production we are in a position to say that her epic poem Enrico is to be considered an accomplished work of art. She does not only combine epic and chivalrous elements; in other words her models are not only Ariosto or Tasso but also Homer's Iliad and Odyssey and Virgil's Aeneid. The setting where the action takes place, Bysantium, allows her, moreover, to make frequent references to ancient Greek culture, and her heroes Venier, Rainiero and Giacinto resemble more Achilles and

Hector than Rinaldo and Orlando. The female character of Claudia is not just an imitation of Tasso's Clorinda. Claudia is the expression of the attributes she had bestowed in La Nobilità upon the legendary Amazons and to Valasca, the friend of the queen of Bohemia, who "possessing a generous and great heart scorned that a man could command to her". Moreover Enrico Dandolo, the main character of the poem, is not idealized as much as Godfrey of Bouillon, the commander in chief of the crusaders in Tasso's Gerusalemme Liberata. Dandolo remains a strong, sharply drawn human figure. He is described as Christ's warrior who chastised tyrants: *Scaccio i Tiranni, e fè novello acquisto del reo Bisantio, qual guerrier di Christo* (Canto 16, stanza 96). Marinelli who is a profound believer and upholds the cause of justice reveals the base motives, ambition, thirst of power and riches, that move Alexis Comnenus to usurp the throne. Honour and justice, much more than love, are the dominant feelings in Enrico, which makes it more epic in tone than even Tasso's Gerusalemme. Moreover the choice of one of Venice's most glorious historical pages enables her to give voice to her deep love for her native city. L'Enrico is often a pretext to give vent to her patriotism, exactly as Luis de Camoes had done about Portugal's maritime achievements in The Lusiads.

In conclusion we believe that of all the poems written by Lucrezia Marinelli the one dealing with the fourth crusade and the conquest of Bysantium is the expression of her maturity as a writer and as a human being and is therefore to be considered her masterpiece. L'Enrico deserves an important place in the genre of

epic poetry, both within Italian and European culture. It is quite remarkable that a single person could be so versed in so many fields: philosophy, literature, music. Physically she was a beautiful woman with curly blonde hair. Moreover, she had a pleasant voice and a remarkable ability in both music and singing. She was one of the first women to teach in public in Venice. She had, as early as in her late twenties, quite a reputation as a poet and as a thinker. She married late in her life, around the age of fifty, after 1625 at any rate, to Girolamo Vacca. Her family name must have been Marinella, because it is so spelled early on in her career as a writer. It became afterwards Marinelli and, after her marriage, she was referred to as Marinelli Vacca. Lucrezia lived a long and fruitful life, and was eighty-two when she died on October 9, 1653 in Venice where she always lived. She was buried in the Church of San Pantaleone.

II

Marinelli and Theories of Sex Identity

Lucrezia Marinelli's La Nobiltà et l'Eccellenza delle donne co'Diffetti et Mancamenti de gli Huomini, when placed in an historical context of works on the identity of woman, is remarkable both for its breadth and depth of philosophical argumentation.²² Indeed, it is the first major text written either by a man or a

woman which is completely devoted to the fundamental theories about woman's identity which had been proposed by previous philosophers.

The earliest theory of sex identity, or sex unity, was first articulated by Plato (c. 428-355BC) in Republic and Laws.²³ Basically it claims that there are no philosophically significant differences between the sexes, and that woman and man are therefore equal in dignity and worth. This view reemerged in Renaissance Platonism with the specific implication that a woman could reason as well as a man. In Renaissance commentaries on love, there were frequent references to Diotima, the teacher of Socrates in the Symposium. This further supported the claim of sex unity that a woman could be a philosopher as well as a man.²⁴

The second theory of sex identity that formed a background for Marinelli's work, or sex polarity, was first formulated by Aristotle (384-322BC).²⁵ In this theory woman was considered to be an imperfect man, to have a biological defect which led to a weakness of mind, and to a difference in virtue. The Aristotelian theory concluded that there were philosophically significant differences between the sexes, and that the male was by nature superior to the female. It is not surprising then that this tradition did not support women philosophers or even the capacity of women to exercise their discursive reasoning.

A third theory, or sex complementarity, was developed in medieval Christian philosophy. Although it was hinted at by Augustine (354-430) and Anselm (1033-1109), its first philosophical defense was provided by Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179) in Causae

et Curae.²⁶ In this view man and woman were thought to be equal in dignity and worth, and yet there were also philosophically significant differences between the sexes. Hildegard's arguments developed an elaborate typology, based upon a medieval theory of humours and elements, of four different kinds of men and women. The use of discursive reason by both men and women was encouraged as a fundamental component of wisdom.

Significantly, Lucrezia Marinelli developed the first completely philosophical rationale for a fourth theory of sex identity, or reverse sex polarity. In this view it is argued that there are philosophically significant differences between the sexes, but in a reversal of the traditional Aristotelian claim for male superiority, we find here a defense of female superiority. The claims for reverse sex polarity were first suggested by the humanist philosopher Henry Cornelius Agrippa (1486-1536) in the 1529 publication of On the Superiority of Woman over Man.²⁷ However, Marinelli's several hundred page manuscript goes far beyond the short text of Agrippa in its support of female superiority. She argued directly against Aristotle's theory of woman's identity, repeatedly invoked Plato's theory to defend the equality of the sexes, demonstrated that she was well aware of works by previous women philosophers such as Hildegard, and developed her own rationale to defend the superiority of woman over man biologically, intellectually, and morally.

Marinelli's philosophical approach to woman did not appear in an intellectual vacuum; she was partly the product of centuries of

discussion about woman's identity by Italian authors. The earliest record of women engaging in discursive reasoning about the subject of woman is found in texts written by men which were either initiated by or dedicated to women. Guido Cavalcanti's (1255-1300) Canzone d'Amore, or "Donna mi prega" was written in direct response to a woman's philosophical questions about the nature and essence of love.²⁸ Leonardo Bruni D'Arezzo's (1388-1444) De Studiis et Literis, was written directly to Battista di Montefeltro about need for a woman to study ethics, and in particular the writings of philosophers such as Epicurus, Xenophon, and Aristotle.²⁹

The next augmentation of the association of woman with discursive reasoning occurred in the writings of men who began to include female participants in philosophical dialogues. Francesco Petrarch (1303-1374) used a female figure 'Laura' in Triumphs and in the Canzoniere entitled "Rime in vita e morte di Madonna Laura" to act as a guide, who taught how to use reason to conquer overwhelming emotions.³⁰ This model followed that of Lady Philosophy in Boethius's (480-524) well known text The Consolation of Philosophy.

Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-1375) used a female figure 'Fiammetta' in Filocolo to represent his view that reason ought to order the instincts. However, it is in the Decameron that seven female figures are included on an equal footing with male characters in exchange of ideas, arguments, and stories. Finally, in Concerning Famous Women, Boccaccio records many examples of what he calls the "keen intelligence" and "intellectual power" of

women.³¹ It should be mentioned in passing, however, that while Marinelli was probably familiar with these writings of Boccaccio, she chose to ignore them possibly because of their condemnation by the Church. Instead, she focused on the Corbaccio or The labyrinth of love, which presented the sex polarity view, or a devaluation of woman.

After the revival of neo-Platonism by the philosopher Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) and the reintroduction of Diotima as Socrates' teacher in his commentary on Plato's Symposium, the presentation in dialogues of a female disputant who teaches a male how to exercise his discursive reason becomes even more prevalent.³² In Leone Ebreo's (1460-c.1521) Dialoghi d'amore the female figure 'Sophia', the personification of mature wisdom, guided her young male student 'Philo', the embodiment of youthful passion, towards a deeper understanding of philosophical love. The dialogue abounds in the exercise of discursive reasoning in long and sustained debate.³³ Other examples of later Renaissance dialogues in which female figures direct the debate can be found in Raffaella by Alessandro Piccolomini (1508-1578), La Leonora by Giuseppe Betussi (1523-1560), and the Dialogo D'Amore and La Nobiltà della donna by Ludovico Domenichi (1515-1564).³⁴ It is sometimes claimed that the use of female figures who represent ideal women in the writings of men do not have any positive effects on the situation of real women. We would argue, however, that these Italian Renaissance texts in which female figures were used to represent the highest level of discursive reasoning, prepared a mental

attitude among their readers in which women were more and more accepted as capable of philosophical disputation.

It is within this context that the next augmentation in the history of philosophical texts about women's identity occurred. Soon men began to make direct arguments that women ought to use their discursive reasoning. In The Book of the Courtier by Baldasar Castiglione (1478-1529) extensive arguments were given against the Aristotlian claim of the inferiority of woman. A character named Magnifico concluded his critique of the Aristotelian Gasparo: "...women can understand all the things men can understand and...the intellect of a woman can penetrate wherever a man's can." The conversations in this dialogue are reputed to be a report of actual discussions which took place at the home of the Duchess Elizabetha in Urbino. ³⁵

In a similar way Pietro Bembo (1470-1547) recorded in Gli Asolani philosophical conversations between four men and three women which were based on actual debates that took place in the court of Caterina, Queen of Cyprus and Lady of Asolo (d. 1510). Gismondo, one of the disputants states clearly that the female disputants should "intervene as often as you please; these discussions are no more ours than yours." Madame Berenice, responds: "I shall feel free to blaze a trail for my companions." ³⁶

Other Renaissance writers who directly supported woman's use of reason were Maffeo Vegio (1407-1458) who in De Educatione Liberorum Clarisque Eorum Moribus wrote about the education of girls; Jacopo Filippo Foresti (1434-1520) who described women

philosophers in De Claris Mulieribus and De Illustribus Foeminis opusculum; and Pompeo Colonna (1479-1532) who in Apologiae Mulierum libri II rejected Aristotle's arguments for women's inferiority, invoked Petrarch and Plato in women's defense, and mentioned several women philosophers by name.³⁷

It should be mentioned that other Renaissance authors took the contrary position and argued forcefully that women should not be educated to exercise their discursive reason. Angelo Pandolfini (1360-1446) in Il Trattato del Governo Della Famiglia, Francesco Barbaro (1390-1454) in De Re Uxoriam and Leone Battista Alberti (1405-1472) in I Libri Della Famiglia all argued that women ought not be given access to books.³⁸ However, for the most part the overwhelming strength of the argument of Renaissance male writers about women's identity was on the side of those who supported woman's development of discursive reasoning, and who particularly encouraged direct exchange of ideas and arguments between women and men. In this way Lucrezia Marinelli's works can be seen as the logical outcome of a preparation which had preceded her for two hundred years.

The final important factor preparatory to Marinelli's extraordinary achievements was the growing number of writings by women themselves. The earliest woman writer about woman's identity with roots in Italy was Christine de Pisan (136-1431). Her texts The Book of the City of Ladies, The Book of Three Virtues, and Mutacion de Fortune, contain many arguments in favour of woman's development of education through reason. She was one of the leading

figures in the "querelle des femmes" about the Rose, a text which devalued women intellectually and morally. In one text she reflects on the long tradition of arguments about women's inferiority and she concludes: "To the best of my knowledge, no matter how long I confronted or dissected the problem, I could not see or realize how their claims could be true when compared to the natural behaviour and character of women."³⁹ Lucrezia Marinelli used precisely this methodology of comparing a sex polarity claim with empirical evidence from women's and men's lives to prove her own theory of the superiority of women.

The next significant woman philosopher to consider woman's identity was Isotta Nagarola da Verona (1418-1466). A prolific writer of letters, Isotta also wrote a philosophical dialogue De Pari aut Evae atque Adam Peccato in which she treated Aristotle's sex polarity arguments with irony. She displayed a direct knowledge of Aristotle's biological justification of the inferiority of woman, and by applying these theories to the question of original sin, she concluded by a *reductio ad absurdum* method that Eve's sin was less serious than Adam's. While she did not use discursive reason to argue directly about woman's identity, Isotta Nogarola directly used Aristotle's arguments to overturn Aristotle himself as well as traditional sex polarity interpretations of the Biblical account of Adam and Eve. Lucrezia Marinelli mentioned Isotta Nagarola several times in her text, so it is reasonable to conclude that her predecessor's work helped prepare the context for her own reflections. ⁴⁰

Finally, it should be mentioned that there were many other women of the Italian Renaissance who engaged in philosophical debate with men in letters. Cassandra Fidelis (1465-1558), Vittoria Colonna (1490-1547), and Veronica Gambara (1485-1550) all gave evidence of philosophical reasoning in their correspondence.⁴¹ Several women writers also completed texts on philosophical subjects. Isabella Sforza (Rossi) (1471-1524) wrote Della Vera Tranquillità Dell' Animo in which she supports a stoical orientation while referring to Socrates, Plato, and Plotinus. Tullia d'Aragona (1506-1565) wrote Della Infinità D'Amore in which a female figure 'Tullia' led a discussion about the nature of love which included reference to Socrates, Diotima, Plato, Aristotle, Seneca, Plutarch, Galen, Petrarch, and Boccaccio. In both of these texts the women writers integrate their own views with those of their predecessors in the context of discursive arguments.⁴²

In conclusion, this introduction to the historical context of Lucrezia Marinelli's work on woman's identity has demonstrated an increasingly sophisticated historical concern with the topic. Men began first to dedicate their works to women, then they included women figures in philosophical dialogues, next they began to actively attack Aristotelian arguments which limited woman's capacity to enter into philosophical discussion, and finally women writers began to reflect on their own experience and to write directly about philosophical issues of sex identity. Therefore, when Lucrezia Marinelli wrote La Nobiltà et l'Eccellenza delle Donne, she was continuing the development of a trend that had

already been firmly established within the Italian Renaissance. However, her own work is by far superior both in its breadth and depth to anything that had been previously written on the subject. It set a new standard and raised the level of debate about women to a much higher level. We will now turn to a detailed examination of her own text to demonstrate her significance. Because Marinelli's work is not available in English, extensive passages will be included below to enable the reader to gain a first hand experience of her remarkable style and the rich content of her thought.

La Nobiltà et Eccellenza delle Donne

Previously in this paper four different theories of sex identity were distinguished: sex polarity, sex unity, sex complementarity, and reverse sex polarity. A careful reading of Lucrezia Marinelli's text reveals that she was a strong proponent of the theory of reverse sex polarity, that is, she attempted to prove that there are significant differences between men and women, and that women are by nature superior to men. The full translation of her lengthy title states her purpose clearly:

The Nobility and Excellence of Women with faults and shortcomings of men. Treatise by Lucrezia Marinelli, in two parts. In the first is presented the nobility of woman by means of irrefutable reasons and infinite examples and not only is Boccaccio's opinion destroyed but also both Tassos', Speroni's, Bishop of Namour's, and Passi's but even the great Aristotle's. In the second is confirmed by means of true reasons and with many examples

quoted from innumerable ancient and modern historians that men's faults supersede by far women's. ⁴³

Marinelli seeks to demonstrate this thesis from two different directions: first that women virtues are better and nobler than men's, and then the converse, that men's faults are worse than women's. In the preamble to her text she restates her goals and identifies the philosophers whom she will defend and attack in this effort:

In this treatise of mine ...I want to show that the feminine sex (*sesso femminile*) is nobler and more excellent than that of men (*huomini*), and I want this truth to shine in everyone's mind. And I hope to show this by means of reasons and examples that every man, even the stubborn ones, will be obliged to confirm with his own mouth. Plutarch came close to understanding this truth, as did Plato, in that great seventh dialogue of the Republic, and in many other books in which he demonstrates that women (*donne*) are nobler and more excellent than men (*huomini*). ⁴⁴

Significantly Marinelli identifies Plato and the neo-Platonists as the defenders of women against traditional sex polarity. However, she goes beyond her sources when she claims that they argued that women were superior to men. Plato's argument simply defended the thesis that women were equal to men although he thought they were somewhat weaker, and he concluded that women ought to have equal access with men to education and to positions of authority in the state. Plutarch did suggest that women were sometimes braver and more courageous than men, in particular situations, but neither he nor Plato defended reverse sex polarity.

Marinelli's preamble continues with a consideration of motives

of previous writers about sex identity, and in it she identifies Aristotle as one of her main targets:

I am not moved by hate, wrath, or envy. On the contrary, these are all very far away from me because I have not wished, nor do I wish, nor will I ever wish, even if I lived at the time of Nestor, to be a male (*maschio*). However, I believe that wrath, hatred, or envy moved Aristotle in several of his works to speak maliciously against and to vituperate the womanly sex (*sesso donnesco*) in the way that he blamed his master Plato in many other places.⁴⁵

In the core of her work Marinelli will produce many sophisticated arguments against Aristotle that reveal an intimate knowledge of his texts. She also separated out many positive contributions of the philosophy of Aristotle from those others she wished to criticize. In fact, Marinelli is the first woman philosopher to our knowledge to offer an in depth analysis of Aristotle's thought on any topic. The fact that she also wrote on the identity of woman makes her work extremely important for the history of woman in philosophy.

Marinelli described the structure of her work as follows:

I shall divide this treatise of mine into two main parts. In the first part I will deal with the nobility and excellence of women; it will be divided into six principal chapters, and the fifth will contain eleven sections. In the second part I will explain the faults and shortcomings of men: it will be divided into thirty-five chapters. Beginning with the excellence of women I will show that they supersede males in nobility of [the etymological origin of] the nouns [used to refer to them], of their causes, of their very nature, of their deeds, and of the opinion of males towards them. And finally I will rebut the very superficial reasons that are daily produced against us by men who lack prudence

and wisdom.⁴⁶

The main core of her philosophical arguments is found in the first part of the text. There she enters into an examination of the premises of Aristotelian thinking which for so long had led to the dominance of the sex polarity theory. She also offers the first analysis of the etymological spectrum of the origin of the word 'woman'. She reveals a wide ranging acquaintance with many women philosophers such as Hildegard of Bingen, Hypatia, and Isotta Nogarola. She reveals a keen capacity for argumentation in the areas of logic, science, ethics, and politics. Finally, in addition to a steadfastness of logical argumentation sustained over 300 pages, Lucrezia Marinelli also frequently displayed a sense of humour and wit that is very appealing to contemporary taste.

The first chapter of her text is a clever manifestation of how etymology and philology can be applied to the philosophy of woman's identity. Appealing to the authority of Averroes and Aristotle in the eighth book of the Metaphysics, who had claimed that proper nouns reveal something of the nature and essence of things, she identifies five nouns that are particularly suited to comprehend the origin of 'woman': *donna*, *femina*, *eva*, *isciah*, and *muller*. Then Marinelli proceeds to argue that each of these nouns reveals a specific kind of superiority of woman over man. She concludes that the name *donna* "denotes lordship and power; but gentle power, or that which corresponds to the nature of the dominant person; because if she ruled as a tyrant, like uncourteous males do, perhaps the insolent detractors of this noble sex would be

silenced."⁴⁷ Next she argues that the name *femina* is either derived from a [Latin] root '*fetu*' that means 'production or generation' or a Greek root '*sos*' that means 'fire'. Marinelli then goes on to claim that identification with generation or fire is, in either case, a sign of the greatness of woman. This second analysis is remarkable in that within the Aristotelian cosmology the male was always associated with generation or with fire. So Marinelli, by means of etymological analysis, reverses and shatters the centuries old and firmly accepted sex polarity of "the" philosopher and his numerous and zealous followers.

The third name of *eva* is given the traditional explanation of the source of life for all animated beings. Marinelli concludes within this description: "...it [the feminine sex] is the one that gives being and life to males. What more can be said than to be able to give being and life? Therefore, this name goes beyond the other two because the first denotes lordship, the second production and fire, but this one life and soul, or the supreme perfection of all living things."⁴⁸

In the analysis of '*isciah*' Marinelli introduces a Platonic model of the soul seeking union with heavenly forms. "This name denotes a celestial, divine and incorruptible fire whose nature is to perfect the soul entrapped in our bodies , to excite it, to teach it, and in sum to allow it to participate in divine perception removing from it all earthly ugliness."⁴⁹

Finally, in the analysis of the fifth noun applied to woman Marinelli takes to its logical conclusion a remark made by

Aristotle himself, to defend her belief in the preeminence of woman: "The last noun is *muller* which is a Latin term which means 'soft and delicate' when applied to the body, but when applied to the soul it means 'gentle and benign.' In either case woman is praised because a soft and delicate flesh reveals that the intellect of such a person understands more quickly than that of someone who has tough and hard flesh. This is what Aristotle teaches saying 'a soft flesh denotes a sharp mind.'"⁵⁰

Marinelli concludes her etymological survey by setting it in a context in which the term 'woman' had often been used disparagingly. This becomes a pretext for a sharp affirmation of reverse sex polarity:

In my opinion all the nouns by means of which I have embellished this honoured sex are, as I clearly proved, the most illustrious and lofty nouns that any human mouth could pronounce. Oh what rare and wonderful and praiseworthy nouns, for they denote and signify all the wonderful perfections that are to be found in this world. Any other noun has to yield to you, for you denote production and generation, fire, and splendour of the world, soul and life, divine and heavenly rays, gentleness and clemency, and finally lordship and power. Therefore, putting all these names in order one can conclude that woman produces the discourteous male, she gives him soul and life, she illuminates him with the splendour of divine light, she preserves him in his earthly appearance by means of warmth and light, makes him contrary to wild beasts, affable, courteous in his soul, and finally, rules over him by means of her pleasing and untyrannical power.⁵¹

In the second chapter Lucrezia turns to the "causes from which woman derive", and she identifies efficient and material causes as

the focus of her analysis. Having recourse to the chain of perfection in being (angels, men, animals) she argues that each kind of thing is derived from a Platonic Idea or eternal exemplar in the mind of God. Appealing to the Renaissance Neo-Platonist Leone Ebreo who had called these ideas "Divine precognitions of produced things", she argues that the "Ideas of women are nobler than those of males, as their beauty and their virtue demonstrates."⁵² Her argument, supported at length later in her book, is: women are more beautiful and more virtuous than men, in that they approach a greater perfection in a Platonic way of thinking that places beauty and virtue very high on the scale of Ideas. She identifies the Ideas with the efficient cause of woman rather than with a mere formal cause. For the material cause, she appeals to the theological argument: "...because a woman is made of a man's rib and a man made of mud she is nobler than he because the rib is nobler than mud."⁵³ As a result reverse sex polarity is supported by an appeal to what she calls both the efficient and material causes of woman and man.

In the third chapter the nature and essence of woman is examined, Marinelli makes the obvious distinction between soul and body, but then she claims that this is applicable to males and females, for they both belong to the same species, and are therefore of the same substance and nature as another female writer had underlined:

...if we want to speak with the philosophers,
we will say that the soul of males is as noble
as that of women because both are of the same
species, and consequently of the same
substance and nature. As Moderata Fonte, in

her work on Floridoro says: "If substances are not different, then why should not nature be the same?"⁵⁴

Equality between men and women derives from their being members of the same species and having, consequently, the same nature.

Marinelli introduces nonetheless degrees of perfection within the same species, and she argues that among human beings woman is more perfect than man from the moment of creation both in body and in soul. Her argument is based on the evidence of the greater beauty of the female body and the authority of many writers whom she quotes. She then appeals to Plotinus and to Marsilio Ficino and quotes passages from their works to prove that a beautiful body is a consequence of beauty in the soul. Marinelli concludes that woman is more perfect than man both in body and in soul. Having followed a Neo-Platonic line of thinking it is not surprising that Marinelli should end this chapter with her first direct attack on Aristotle's devaluation of woman:

Nature, knowing the perfection of the feminine sex, produces women more abundantly than men, for nature always generates more of those things that are better and more perfect. And therefore it seems to be that Aristotle, against all reason and even against his own opinion that nature always aims towards the more perfect, believes that women are imperfect when compared with males. On the contrary, I would say that since nature produces a smaller number of males than women, that men are the less noble sex for nature does not wish to generate a large and abundant quantity.⁵⁵

It is in the next chapter, however, that Lucrezia Marinelli forcefully begins to take on Aristotle and the Aristotelians who

were so strongly entrenched at the 'Mecca' of Peripatetic philosophy, the University of Padua.

Marinelli ironically uses Aristotle to support her views of reverse sex polarity by stressing the logical implications in being the subject of respect. Women, being the object of honour, are better:

If women are the targets of honour they are nobler than males who honour them because the honoured thing is always more worthwhile than he who honours it, for no one honours another individual if he does not acknowledge that he has some quality which is superior to himself as Aristotle himself says in the fourth book of the Ethics. Everything which excels is more honourable. Honour being a price of virtue that shines in someone for a benefit received as Aristotle claims in the eight book of The Ethics, chapter 16, for the reason that honour is the gift of virtue and benefit. Therefore, it is necessary to conclude that woman is nobler than man, because she is honoured by him⁵⁶

Marinelli is well aware of Aristotle's direct arguments against the dignity of woman, nevertheless, whenever she can find a pretext, she skilfully uses the device of adulatio perniciosa. She seems to praise him, only to criticize him better using his own words. A case in point is a spurious text which was believed to be written by Aristotle during her time:

Aristotle himself gives several [examples of] the primacy of women even though he was their enemy and wanted to blame them; he gives diligence as their typical virtue...as one can see in book 1, chapter 3 of the Economics: "A woman is excellent at being faithful whereas a man is weaker." From these words one can understand how very wrong he was in other places where he claims that women are flighty

and unstable, because diligence⁵⁷ requires stability of mind and steadfastness.

Marinelli cleverly underlines Aristotle's apparent inconsistency in praising women in some places of his writings, while condemning them in others. By the end of the 16th century Aristotle's authority was being challenged. The moderns saw him as an easy target to attack. Galileo in the physical and Descartes in the philosophical domain were already at work destroying the often fanatical worship of the Peripaticians and the exemplary and indisputable wisdom of Aristotle. Marinelli is certainly with the moderns. This explains her lack of reverential attitude towards him and her addressing him in a familiar, witty manner several times in her treatise.

In addition, Marinelli's profound knowledge of Aristotle's works entitles her to mock the unconditional Paduan followers of Aristotle who swear by his words and deny even common sense. Marinelli's special perspective in the reading and interpreting of his works enables her to keep the necessary mental detachment to see the shortcomings and the contradictions present in them. In order to defend and illustrate the merits of the female sex she cannot blindly accept Aristotle's arguments on authority. She is very sarcastic towards those who stretch his words to fit their own distortions. When Aristotle's opinion does not agree with her own conception of womanhood Lucrezia Marinelli is not afraid to declare openly her opposition. She is very subtle and skillful in her dialectical approach: she has the great ability to cut through with

a logical blow the opinions held by her opponents. This is especially evident in the second part of her treatise where she deals with men's faults.

The following lengthy passage demonstrates the ambivalence she felt in her use of and rejection of Aristotle:

The good old fellow [Aristotle] also stated in the ninth book, chapter 1 of the History of Animals that women are more perspicacious and sagacious than males. It is useless for me to prove how useful perspicacity of mind is, and I will not even take the pains of demonstrating it, for in the subtlety of the intellect one can discover good judgment, as Aristotle himself claims in the sixth book of the Ethics, chapter 10. However, not only are women more sagacious but also more shrewd than men, and he himself admitted it saying that "women are more shrewd than their husbands...Women are also more vigilant...and in their habits women are more merciful and benign than males as one can read in the same place...Therefore, we can say that woman being more merciful than man is also consequently wiser and has a quicker mind. She is also more modest than he is. The same Aristotle in the ninth book of the History of Animals in the above quoted chapter tells an interesting exaggeration unworthy of them. What am I saying, unworthy? On the contrary, because in other places he tells many other which resemble it, which is that women are less shameful than males, what a ridiculous statement. His exact words are: "Impudentior maribus"; this is against the commonly held opinion and against experience. Go all the way Aristotelians and stretch and declare with a thousand illusions his opinion, for in many other places he claims the opposite. I am not really surprised that he claims it, for he loved his own sex with a strong fervour, and in the same chapter he uttered that women can be more easily deceived than males... Not keeping in mind that just before he had said that they are shrewder and more sagacious and more insidious than men; all qualities that are contrary for the sagacious being deceived

or trapped, and the shrewd can foretell another person's frauds. For man to be more sagacious than woman it would be necessary that he try to deceive a shrewd one who is one and a half times more shrewd. Demosthenes could not defend Aristotle from this error of his. But enough of him now. Let us put him aside. And I curse him. How many times does Plato celebrate women, in so many places?⁵⁸

The use of Plato as a foil to the sex polarity of Aristotle is a common theme in Marinelli's writings. It demonstrates that their two opposing views on the concept of woman were well known by her, and even perhaps by her readers. In the next chapter in which she considers various virtues, Marinelli compares an unnamed disciple of Aristotle with Plato on the question of the public and private spheres of activity:

Today you find few women who dedicate themselves to studies or to military art because men, fearing to lose their power and to become servants of women, forbid them from even learning how to read and write. That good friend of Aristotle claims that females must at all times and in all occasions obey males, and they must not seek to know about or participate in what is being done outside their household. [This is] a stupid and cruel sentence of a tyrannical and fearful man. Let us excuse him because, being a man, it was only natural that he would wish the greatness and superiority of men and not of women. However, Plato, that great man, [who was] in truth very just and far from imposed and violent domination, wished and ordained that women should take part in military art, in riding, and in wrestling, and that they should also go and give their opinion about the needs of the Republic.⁵⁹

Marinelli next quotes extensively from the Republic to support the claim she just made. Her first hand knowledge of the Platonic text is evident, and she also correctly understands the difference

between Plato's support of the equality of women and men and the Aristotelian support for the superiority of men over women in the two areas of ruling and participation in the public sphere of activity. She concludes this chapter with a rousing support for reverse sex polarity:

God willing, how wonderful it would be if in our time and day women were allowed to exercise in arms and in letters. Wonderful things would be seen and unheard of both in maintaining and expanding kingdoms. And who would be a better shield than women to defend with their intrepid courage, and how quickly, and with such ardor, we would see them spill blood, and even life in defence of males. Women are much nobler in their activities than men; if they do not exercise, or if they do not partake in this, it is because they are forbidden by men who are being motivated by their obstinate ignorance being, as they are, cocksure that women are not good at learning what they themselves are learning. I would like such individuals to make this experiment: to exercise a boy and a girl of the same age and of the same good nature and talent in letters and arms. They would see in a very short time that the girl would much more quickly learn than the boy, and better, that she would beat him by a great margin.⁶⁰

In the following section of her treatise Lucrezia Marinelli turns to history in search of a broad context for women thinkers. In this way she moves away from a strict, traditional appeal to the Aristotelian or Platonic schools, and seeks instead a cohesive, intellectual framework within which to argue for the advancement of women scholars. Chapter vi is entitled: "Of women learned and knowledgable of many arts". She begins by attacking those writers who through the centuries displayed a lack of knowledge of history when they were surprised to discover women who had been or were

skilled in the arts. Then she mentions several of these women by name:

But what do we say about Aspasia, who was most learned in philosophical studies and who was the most worthy teacher of the great Pericles? What of Assotea? who both Apuleius and Plutarch celebrate in the book of the dogma of Plato. She was a disciple of Plato and acquired great knowledge in the study of philosophy. That is why she is one of the most illustrious and noteworthy names... Hildegard of Germany, did she not write very learnedly four books about natural causes?... What about Aretafila? Who was the wife of Nicostratus, tyrant of Cyrene, on the account of her eloquence... Theano was most excellent in lyrical verses, and another Theano from Metapontus, or Cresca wrote the commentary of the virtue of philosophy and many other illustrious poems. Hypatia of Alexandria, the wife of the philosopher Isodorus wrote some commentaries on astronomy. Heptatichia, the daughter of the great geometer Theon was so famous in the study of philosophy that she succeeded Plotinus and she lectured in the very same school and cathedral. As Suidas wrote she was knowledgable in the science of astronomy, and publicly she demonstrated her knowledge of many other sciences, and she had a great quantity of pupils attending her lectures. Iambe was the inventor of the iambic verse. Diotima was so knowledgable in the discipline of philosophy that Socrates did not blush in calling her teacher, and he used to attend her learned lessons as Plato says in the Symposium.

Marinelli does not only appeal to ancient women, but she lists also some others who wrote much closer to her own time period.

What shall we say about the great ingenuity and of the profound memory of Damigella Triultia? She was a miracle of nature and recited orations many times in the presence of Pontiffs that she herself wrote in the Latin language. She also learned Greek letters, and whenever she heard anyone recite an oration, even once, she knew it by heart word by word, and if she read a book once or

twice she knew how to recite it all. Marguerite, the sister of the King of France and wife of the King of Navarre, was most learned in sacred letters...Cassandra Fedele was also very learned and she gave public disputations in Padua and wrote an elegant book on the order of the sciences. In addition to writing very beautiful verses, worthy of great wonder was the profound knowledge in philosophy and poetry of Lucretia da Este, duchess of Urbino...Veronica of Gambarara was most learned in poetry, and as we can still see, she was most exceptional in her writings...Victoria Colonna was most learned and composed very many beautiful sonnets and was praised by Ariosto...

Let us say something now about Isotta Nogarola from Verona, who knew philosophical doctrines very well and who led a philosophical life and was satisfied to live on very little. She wrote to Popes Nicholas, Pius, and she remained a virgin...And nor must we forget Roswitha, a nun from Saxony, who wrote many books in prose and in verse.⁶²

Marinelli did not just appeal to the rich intellectual heritage of these women writers simply for rhetorical reasons:, they constituted a source of inspiration and spurred her on as a woman poet and philosopher. By seeing herself part of a tradition, she felt the desire to emulate other illustrious women thinkers. She was so widely read and had such a grasp of the range of previous and contemporary scholarship that she was able to enter into direct discussion with those she had studied on a wide range of topics.

The final group of women scholars she refers to are the women religious writers, who nonetheless wrote original works which Marinelli recognized even this early for their historical significance:

Where to put St. Brigit? who wrote a noble book on her revelations? Where St. Catherine of Siena, whose letters and dialogues demonstrate what a profound knowledge she had, for she recited in front of Popes Gregory XI and Urban VI very convincingly....Hildegard, Virgin from the city of Magontia wrote many books, and St. Bernard who lived at the same time wrote to her many letters. Catherine, the daughter of Costo, King of Alexandria disputed against many learned philosophers who were trying to convince her of idolatry, and she with very pertinent reasons convinced them of the faith of Christ as she was skilful in the science of philosophy where she learned, as Marco Filippo, surnamed the evil one, writes in her Life. This shows what a little girl can learn if she sets aside the needle and the cloth.⁶³

At the end of the first part of chapter vi Marinelli shows her biting wit and her frustration with the limited alternatives that were open to women at the time.

In the remaining long section of chapter vi Marinelli usually begins with identifying a particular virtue, continues by paraphrasing the Aristotelian concept of the virtue, and concludes with well known women who embody each virtue. She lists fortitude, prudence, justice, magnificence, skill in military arts, tolerance, bodily strength, love for family, and love for their homeland as virtues in which women, she argues, have excelled. In many instances women have surpassed men, according to Marinelli, who, thus, supports concretely her claim of reverse sex polarity.

In order to better realize and appreciate Lucrezia Marinelli's theoretical sharpness at this point in the analysis of her treatise, it is necessary to take a more detailed scrutiny at

Marinelli's complex relation with Aristotle and his disciples. On the one hand, throughout the rest of the book she continuously uses with approbation Aristotle's definitions of concepts; while on the other hand, she attacks his views of women both from the point of view of the evidence he provides for their support and from the motive she believes that drives him to these views. Her work is an outstanding example of a philosopher entering into a careful study of the ancient Greek master and coming to decisions about each and every different theory or belief he holds.

To begin, Marinelli in chapter vii of Part I evaluates the motives of her intellectual enemies:

It seems to me that I have clearly shown that women are nobler and more excellent than men. Now it remains for me to rebut the false objections of slanderers. They are of two types. Some of them are based on apparent reasons, and some others upon sheer authority and their own opinion.⁶⁴

Mentioning a doubtful story by Diogenes Laertius she suggests that Aristotle was motivated by envy of his wife, by inordinate self love, and by wrath towards the female sex in general. After mocking interjections such as "Aristotelians forgive me" she concludes:

These are the reasons that moved poor old Aristotle to claim that women are mendacious and chatterboxes, more envious and sharp tongued, and he did not realize that while he was saying that they were sharp tongued he himself became part of their number. In Book nine of the History of Animals, and in other passages, he claimed that they [women] are material, imperfect, weak, defective, and lighthearted, which I already spoke about in chapter iii. He could also be accused of taking the whole thing lightly, and he

probably made a mistake about the nature and essence of women, [which was] likely too great a task for his small shoulders, not having maturely considered their nobility and excellence.⁶⁵

Reprimanding Aristotle and others for making universal judgments from a particular example, Marinelli continues by examining some of the specific claims made by him.

The first argument focuses on the core of the Aristotelian theory, namely the claim that the imperfection of the female is derived from the "fact" that males are hotter than females. Ironically, Marinelli seems to accept in part the Aristotelian premise, but instead she argues that heat rather than cold is an imperfection.

Some claim like the good old Aristotle that women are less warm than men and are, therefore, less perfect and less noble. Oh what an indissoluble and omnipotent reason! I am convinced that Aristotle did not take into careful account the way warmth works, and what it means to be warmer or colder, and all the good and bad effects that are caused by it. For if he had thought it out well, he would have found out how many very bad operations that heat produces, and he would not have uttered a single word concerning [the warmth in men] which exceeds that of women. However, he went searching around like a blind urchin, and as a result he made a thousand mistakes.⁶⁶

After appealing to the Platonists' Plutarch's mention of the "golden mean" as the prudent guide for ethical choice and Ficino's qualifications that only certain degrees of warmth are good, she continues to evaluate Aristotle:

Therefore, Aristotle's reasoning does not have any value. Males are warmer than women,

therefore, they are considered to be nobler in spite of the fact that we see that young people are not thought to be nobler than men who are in their middle age, and yet they [the young] are warmer. Not to mention the number of women who are by nature warmer than men. As a consequence one can not concede that Aristotle's statement is true when applied to all women. For there are many provinces, I will not say cities or castles, where women are by nature warmer than men of another province such as those of Spain and Africa who are warmer than the men who inhabit the cold northern climates and Germany. And how many do we believe were or are warmer by nature than Aristotle or Plato and are therefore nobler in their operation of soul? We shall conclude, therefore, in this way: that woman is less warm than man and as a result nobler, and that if any man who performs excellent deeds does it because he comes closest to the nature and temperature of women, for there is a placid and non-exceeding warmth in him, and that is why in middle age man the intensity of the warmth becomes more tepid than in youth, and coming closer to the feminine nature, he acts more wisely and maturely.⁶⁷

In the above passage while Marinelli sought to offer some counter evidence to the Aristotelian claim that males were hotter than females by considering cross cultural examples, she ends up with accepting the premise as a general truth, but argues that warmth by itself does not determine nobility. Rather the principle of moderation of warmth, which is closer to feminine nature, appears to support a greater nobility. This argument is the same as the one found in Hildegard of Bingen's work, although Marinelli did not cite her predecessor, and it is possible that she simply came to the same conclusion by her own observations.

At the beginning of the second part of the book where the

faults of men are identified and discussed, Marinelli returns again to the Aristotelian argument about hot and cold. Once again repeating the identification of the male with greater heat, Marinelli argues that this leads men to an excess in their passions. She then hones her argument towards its consequence for sex identity:

All learned men are convinced that males are nobler than females because they are warmer by nature...I would add that it renders men unstable and inconsistent because "warmth shakes the body", and as Chalcidius says in his commentary on the Timaeus of Plato, "the soul is more mobile because of warmth". What great faults are those that spring from such a warmth that they praise and exalt so much, for because of it, the reasonable soul is bent and led astray from the right path of virtue, and allows itself to precipitate in dishonesty and lust out of which infinite other errors and enormous misdemeanours are born; this can not happen to the womanly sex, because being by nature warm and humid, their senses are ruled by reason. They are more temperate, more constant, more steadfast, more just, and more prudent than men, This happens because reason stays in its own seat, which does not happen in the male, as I show with examples. How unhappy man would be if he had not the company of that rare gift which is woman? Because I believe that one would not be able to find in the world a more crude and more horrendous monster than he is, nor a wilder and pitiless animal. But thanks to God woman restrains him, humbles him, [and] renders him capable of reason and civil life.⁶⁸

Therefore, Marinelli sees the humidity of women as a restraining force on their natural heat. This brings a greater balance into the female nature which in turn allows them to moderate and restrain men. In her defense of reverse sex polarity we find the complete reverse of Aristotelian sex polarity which had claimed that women

needed men to order to rule their inferior reason. The entire second part of the book gives examples of men who do not live virtuous lives. In this way Marinelli supports her theoretical argument that women are nobler than men.

In a similar way Marinelli examines the argument that men are nobler than women because they are "more robust, stronger, and better at carrying weight." Marinelli argues first that if women were used to hard physical labour that they would be as strong as men. Then she turns her argument around and claims that among men themselves greater physical strength is not taken as a sign of nobility.

I do not believe that Aristotle, who defines women as being languid and similar to the left hand, was himself strong like peasants or many women are. He was then less noble than rough peasants and many women, and similarly blacksmiths would be nobler than kings or learned persons, which is completely unreasonable.⁶⁹

It needs to be pointed out for historical accuracy, that the introduction of the Pythagorean association of the female with the left and male with the right was an inaccurate inference by Marinelli, for Aristotle rejected this view himself. Nonetheless, later in the text she again wrongly identified this view with Aristotle, and she invoked Plato who showed "that there is absolutely no difference between the right and the well trained left" to refute the claim that there was any less nobility in being associated with the left.⁷⁰ In spite of her misassociation of this view with Aristotle Marinelli concludes her analysis of the

relation of strength to sex identity with an open call to women to step out of the false assumption that lack of physical strength has limited them:

For the very same reason the womanly sex, which is more delicate than the manly sex, even if it is less robust not being used to hard labour, is the object of tyranny and is trampled upon by insolent and unjust men. However, if women, as I hope, will wake up from their long sleep which has oppressed them, then men who are now ungrateful and cocky will become tame and humble.¹¹

Marinelli gives many arguments against Aristotelians which are often derived from basic theories of the Greek philosopher himself. However, she examines them in the works of more recent writers with whom she is most acquainted. The most extensive set of arguments were given against philosophers named Ercole Tasso and Monseigneur Henri de Namour. Marinelli summarizes eight different arguments to prove that the female sex is less noble than the male:

Man is both an act and a form, he reasons better. Therefore, woman is the result of the worst part [misbegotten form]. The second is that everything that does not have its own end in itself is vile, and they are generated as a function of someone else. Such is woman who was created from man. Woman does not have in herself her own being because she received it from man's rib. And therefore [she] is not a being. The fourth is: everything which comes to life against the intention of nature is a vice or a monster. Woman is a monster. The fifth is that woman is born because of a fault in the operating of nature like monsters who [are generated] by fault or superabundance of matter. Therefore, she is born by accident. The sixth is that every woman would like to be a man as an ugly person wants to be handsome and every stupid person learned. The seventh is that woman is particularly influenced by the moon. The eighth, women are usually humid and cold, and this is clear from the softness

of their flesh and the size of breasts. The ninth and last, laws, exclude women from holding public office.⁷²

Of the above views the first, fourth, fifth, and sixth are Aristotelian in some way. Marinelli answers each and every claim. In most cases she simply repeats her previous conclusions, for example, that man has a more perfect form or capacity for reasoning without presenting any new evidence. However, to the fourth argument, namely that woman is a monster, she introduces new evidence:

To the fourth I concede that those things which are born against the intention of nature are monsters and vice, but I deny strongly that women are born in such a way, first of all because monsters are seen rarely and are generated by nature. That is why we see many more women than men being born. Therefore, I say, that men are monsters for nature generates an abundance of what is better and a lesser quantity of what is worse. Besides nature's intent in the generation of the female is the same as that of the male if she wants to perpetuate the human species, because both the female and the male are required for generation.⁷³

Even though Marinelli turns the Aristotelian argument around to initially prove that men, not women are monsters, if the criterion of abundance is used, in the end she reaches a conclusion similar to that of Albert and Thomas Aquinas, namely that nature intends to produce both males and females. This view corrects Aristotle's original claim that in each conception nature intends to produce the males only, and that the female is a 'misbegotten or deformed male'.

In another section Lucrezia Marinelli considers the arguments

possessing one and the same kind of soul, and the same strength as all peripatetics state, and even Xenophon knew this and speaks about it in his *Economicus* where he says: *Virum fecit audaciorem mulier, memoriam vero, et intelligentiam dedit fratrem*," I would say that speculation is as proper to a woman as it is for a man, but man does not allow a woman to spend time for such contemplations fearing, with reason, her superiority. Similarly I deny that womanly prudence consists only in being obedient to her husband because Aristotle defines prudence, as 'he who knows how to counsel to chose what is best regarding future things'; but who can deny that there have been many women in military government and also in government during peace, and that they have been very, very prudent? Read the chapter about prudent women, and who can deny that woman shows a very great prudence in governing her household?

Marinelli's use of discursive reason extends also to Boccaccio whose theories she describes at the end of the first part of her book. As mentioned previously Boccaccio with the misogynist views he expressed in his Corbaccio. Marinelli seems to be unaware of his more positive descriptions of women in his other writings especially The Decameron. She begins by summarizing his various arguments against women. She then uses Aristotle's theories from the History of Animals, the Ethics, and the spurious Economics. She matches what she identifies as Boccaccio's views step by step with equally strong observations of her own:

To destroy his false opinion I will say beginning from the beginning that women are not imperfect animals, nor do they suffer from a thousand passions, except those that man's perverse nature make them feel and produces in them every day. Woman does not want to be born a servant, for he who is by nature born a servant does not aspire to Lordship but he keeps on living in his native serfdom. One can say, therefore, that since women aspire to

husband and wife, which is not found between master and servant. I would like to add also that in the first book of the Politics, chapter eight that he openly shows what kind of preeminence the husband must exercise over his wife: there are two kinds of power, one civil and the other royal...with these words he concludes that a man has civil power over a woman and a royal one towards his son. Civil power is that of those who sometimes commands and sometimes are commanded.⁷⁵

After using Aristotle to defend her view that woman was not born to serve man, but rather that there should be a kind of mutual service and companionship in the husband wife relationship, Marinelli concludes with an *ad hominem* attack on Speroni:

Therefore, it is easy to see that Speroni's opinion is lacking those foundations which are true and real. Perhaps he went along with this opinion moved by the tyrannical insolence of many men who are being served not only by their wives, but by their mothers, and by their sisters with such a degree of vigilance and fear that with a lesser degree of fear do lowly servants and slaves serve their lords and masters.⁷⁶

Marinelli continues to use this pattern of argument against other modern writers. She considers several points of Torquato Tasso, the 16th century epic poet who she claims follows Aristotle and Thucydides in his views about women. Again Marinelli addresses each and every argument which range across themes such as physical strength, different virtues, and different intellectual powers. Although she argues that Tasso follows Aristotle, she uses Aristotle in the original to defeat some of Tasso's views:

Concerning the distinction he makes between the virtues, the speculative ones being denied as proper to women, I do not agree with this supposition of his. On the contrary, women being of the same species as men and

of a peripatetic philosopher Sperone. In this case, she uses Aristotle himself to undermine the argument of his disciple:

In one of his dialogues entitled The Dignity and Nobility of women he [Sperone] tries to prove that women are born to serve man, and that they are generated by nature to do that, like those that are imperfect and impotent. 'A woman is not a woman without serving her husband, for it is her natural condition to serve.' To destroy this opinion I deny that a woman is her husband's servant. If, however, we want to use Aristotelian principles, she is always called in every place a companion who is held in esteem by her husband, as is stated in the Economics, chapter 3. "*Societas enim est maxime secundum naturam mari, et feminæ*" These words prove that he did not say 'servant by nature', but 'companion by nature'. From these words it is clearly shown that it is meant in association with love and exchangeable works, and in the second chapter of the second book he [Aristotle] says clearly that man, that is, the husband, must give honour to his wife. "*Prudentem ignorare non debet qui honores convenient uxori*". The same idea is found in the first book of the family, which is that man must honour with reverence his wife...¹⁴

In the above passage the text that Marinelli uses is the now recognized spurious Economicus. However, her argument is also based on several other legitimate Aristotelian sources. In this case she is using Aristotle to defend a kind of equality between husband and wife which in a way goes even beyond the usually accepted Aristotelian polarity and moves towards the Thomistic revision of his views about the relation of husband and wife:

Therefore, Aristotle concludes with honour that between husband and wife there has to be a sincere companionship and unanimous concord, accompanied by a certain amount of reverence, which is not due in relations of servants and masters. Besides this, he also stated in the seventh book of the fifth chapter of the Ethics that there has to be friendship between

power they are not born servants but masters, as their very name of *donna* implies and demonstrates.⁷⁸

Since his arguments were bordering on satire, she concludes with her own satire, and once again with an *ad hominem* reflection on what led Boccaccio to reach such conclusions about women:

Lastly, moved by anger he dares to claim that they are unshapely, ugly, and smelly, which is a most strange statement since their beauty is a gift given to them by nature and by God...There is no greater cleanliness and tidiness in this world of ours than women's, since they hate messiness which renders their pretty bodies ugly, and all those things that emanate stinky odour. However, men being rougher creatures, born to serve, and less adorned are much more frequently untidy and dirty, as we can see. Some of them have much more grease and filth around their mustache and neck than cook cauldrons, and such a stench comes forth from their body that women who stand by them are obliged to plug their nose. I do not deny, however, that there are some women who are a little untidy, and a little unpleasant odour comes from them, like the woman who was loved by our urchin [Boccaccio], who since she was closer to her old age, and had eyes lacking a vivacious splendour, was constantly coughing, and was suffering from other faults typical of a senile age, and she was in truth a woman worthy of him. Boccaccio, may God have compassion on his soul, composed this book on the labyrinth out of anger and in a state moved by a very bitter affliction which brought him also to wish death.⁷⁹

Marinelli's methodology matches that of her opponent. If he offers reasoned arguments, she seeks to provide the same. If he attacks in a satirical mode, she responds with more of the same. Perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of her relation with Aristotle, who is the core opponent in many respects, in the way

in which she uses his own theories to prove her point in the second half of the book. In this part, after she has proven to her satisfaction that women are nobler than men in the first part, she seeks to corroborate her belief that men have more faults than women, as the proof of the contrary. Not only are women's virtues better than men's, but the contrary is also true. That is, men's vices are worse than women's. To do this she uses Aristotelian definitions of a particular vicious characteristic, and then she produces example upon example of men to give evidence of that fault. Her sources are extensive; she uses Plutarch, Livy, Ovid, and Virgil as well as modern historians such as Tarcagnola, Giovio, and Botero, besides Dante, Petrarch, and several Petrarchian poets. In addition she draws upon her own personal experience to supplement her examples of vicious men.

The various vices of men are considered in thirty-five chapters under the following headings: 1)avarice, 2)envy, 3)incontinence, (including gluttons, drunkards, and generally unrestrained individuals), 4) wrathful, bizarre, and beastly men, 5) the haughty and arrogant, 6) sloth, negligence, and daydreaming, 7) tyrannical men and usurpers of states, 8)men ambitious and lustful for glory, 9) vainglorious and bragging men, 10) cruel, unjust, and lethal men, 11) fraudulent, treacherous, perfidious, and perjurious men, 12) obstinate and stubborn men, 13) ungrateful and discourteous men, 14) inconstant and quick tempered men, 15) malicious men and those who easily hate others, 16) greedy men, thieves, assassins, and pirates, 17) cowardly, fearful, and vile

men, 18) blasphemers and despisers of God, 19) incantors, magicians, and soothsayers, 20) mendacious men and liars, 21) jealous men, 22) ornate, polished, embellished and bleached-haired men, 23) heretics and founders of sects, 24) men who are tearful and prone to weeping, 25) gamblers, 26) slanderers and false accusers, 27) talkative men and chatterboxes, 28) forgetful men, 29) men of little talent and fools, 30) men who killed their fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, and nephews, 31) men who killed their sons, 32) hypocrites and diviners, 33) seditious men and rioters, 34) ignorant and boorish men, and 34) flatterers.

The above listing of the chapter headings gives a clear idea of the range of Marinelli's analysis. It is the first time in the history of western thought that a woman gave so thorough a view of the faults of men. While there has been a long tradition of literature, much of which was satirical, about the faults of women, the complement perspective had never been published. It is clear that Marinelli is arguing for a reverse sex polarity because she frequently repeats after demonstrating how many well known men exemplify one sort of a vice or another, that very few women have been known to do the same. In this way she continually supports her claim that women are superior to men.

Lucrezia Marinelli's use of Aristotle to define the particular virtue that women exemplify in the first part of her treatise, or the particular vice that men exemplify in the second part merely points out her skill in appealing to the main historical, literary, and philosophical authority of the times. It seems that she

accepted for the most part Aristotle's definitions of virtues and vices in The Ethics, and that she agrees with his distinctions of the states of character. Therefore, Marinelli brilliantly uses Aristotle against himself, or using Aristotle in general to defeat Aristotle on the particular subject of woman's identity in relation to man. It can be safely claimed that Marinelli gives the most extensive display of the effective use of discursive reason by a woman about the question of woman's identity up to the sixteenth century. In this way Lucrezia Marinelli can be seen as the epitome of the Renaissance woman, the one reached the highest development of intellectual skill.

There are two evaluative comments that should be made after this lengthy descriptive account of Marinelli's philosophy of the sexes. The first concerns her relation to Aristotle, and the second her support for reverse sex polarity. Marinelli made the important distinction in her analysis of Aristotle between his philosophy of the human being in general, and his philosophy of woman in particular. She accepted many of the main premises of his thought about the human being, particularly in the area of ethics. In this Marinelli recognized the important contributions of Aristotle to philosophy, and affirmed his importance. At the same time, however, she attacked his philosophy of woman, and as previously mentioned, was the first philosopher to give a thorough evaluation of this aspect of his thought. Her attack was, therefore, not directed to Aristotle as a whole, but rather to an aspect of his thought that was clearly limited.⁸⁰

Marinelli's argument that woman is not simply equal, but superior to man is not defended by the authors of this paper. It is clear that she reacted to the centuries of sex polarity theory which argued the contrary, namely that man is superior in dignity and worth to woman. At the same time, Marinelli has to be recognized as the first philosopher to give a thorough defense for reverse sex polarity. In general the theorists of sex identity from the Italian Renaissance supported a traditional sex polarity or defended an emerging sex complementarity. The latter view, or the claim that women and men are significantly different and yet equal in dignity and worth is the one preferred by the present authors. However, it is not possible, given the length of this article, to analyze Marinelli's theory from this alternative perspective. Our goal was simply to elaborate for the first time in English her own thinking about the subject so that readers could have access to information which would enable them to form their own judgment of her views.

Marinelli's Political Thinking

Lucrezia Marinelli's treatise On the Nobility and Excellence of Women deserves, for the reasons we have indicated, an important place in the history of thought about the concept of woman. Although being relatively young when she wrote her treatise, (she was in her late twenties), and not receiving a formal university education, she had a profound knowledge of Greek, Roman, medieval and renaissance culture as extensive as the most learned humanists'

of her time. She quotes extensively from Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, Ariosto, Tasso, and numerous other 15th and 16th century authors. She is able to combine her love of poetry with the neo-Platonic philosophical tradition. She knows and quotes and uses appropriately Plotinus, the Fathers of the Church, St. Augustine, Ficino, Leone Ebreo, and so forth. Her concept of womanhood, therefore, is a skillful combination of elements taken from antiquity or from the classical and renaissance literary and philosophical tradition with a keen awareness of the social conditions of her own time. She is convinced of the biological and intellectual worth of women, and she is able to prove by means of discursive reasoning that women are equal if not superior to men. The reason why they do not enjoy the same social status and privileges is because men have systematically denied the same rights to women.

Compared with other female writers who are more famous such as Vittoria Colonna, she is by far more profound in her understanding of the social forces at play. Lyrical poetry is but one aspect of her production. She uses reason and gives a sociological explanation for her own condition, and the role she can play, which is something unique. The typical woman could be either a 'cortigiana' or a singer or a noble lady in order to be appreciated. By contrast, she is a bourgeois and she knows it. Frequently, in her treatise she makes references to the way in which women from different social classes dress, behave, speak, and think. From this point of view, Marinelli is certainly further

ahead than her own time. In many ways she is an anomalous case; and she knows that she is an exception, for frequently she underlines the jealousy, and the narrow-mindedness women must bear. Often they are obliged to stay home and be the servants of the whimsical wishes of their brothers and fathers, not withstanding the fact that Venice at the time used to be the freest of all the Catholic states.

Venice was still at the intellectual avant-garde in Europe during Marinelli's life, which is clearly shown in the way she thinks and writes. The so-called decadence that affected the Italian peninsula became evident after Galileo's condemnation in 1633. However, in the first three decades, Italy, and especially Venice, Florence, Naples, and Rome could still boast to be four major cultural centres in Europe, and John Milton's trip to Italy and his imitation of both Della Casa and Tasso besides Shakespeare's choice of his settings based upon several of Giraldis Cinthio's short stories could be a proof of the intellectual leadership that Italy was still exercising. Nor must we forget Giordano Bruno's influence on English neo-Platonists at Oxford, and especially Giambattista Marino's roaring success as a poet at the French court in the early 1620's.

Lucrezia Marinelli is, in some ways, an exceptional figure, but she is also very much a product of the cultural reality in which she grew up and of which she was a part. This can be seen especially when we look at Marinelli's moral and political thinking. She is a devout Catholic, and she follows the tendency

to find in the Roman historian Tacitus or in the Jesuit Giovanni Botero, besides other less important historians like Tarcagnola, the basis of her own convictions. This is evident especially in the second part of the treatise, where numerous examples of the moral corruption and evil behaviour of men are taken from the late Roman Imperial period. The names of the emperors Nero and Caligula recur constantly and are the epitome of male wickedness. Another illustration of her adherence to common moral principles is her acceptance that ethics and politics cannot be separated. She proves it by using Botero's Della Ragion di Stato that tried to reconcile politics and morality.

It is interesting to underline that the name of Cesare Borgia, the new prince according to Machiavelli, appears several times in her treatise, but strangely, or, even better, logically, the name of the atheist, Nicolo Machiavelli is never mentioned since his works had been put on the index of forbidden books. From this point of view, therefore, Marinelli, like Zuccolo or Ammirato is a typical 'tacitista.'

Marinelli's importance and originality is to be found in the first part of her treatise. It is when she speaks about her own condition as a woman that she is most persuasive. Her resentments possess both intellectual strength and emotional intensity. She is very clever at using sarcasm and irony whenever the opinion of another writer or philosopher which constitutes the authority to deprecate and belittle womanhood is considered. She frequently mocks Giuseppe Passi, who had written a book condemning women.

However, he is not the only target. Peripaticians, philosophers in books, people who are incapable of thinking for themselves, are also often the target of her wit.

The portrait that Marinelli paints of womanhood in her treatise, is multifaceted, but it can be summarized in the definition of 'donna onesta'. A woman has to be first of all a female, that is, she has not to deny her specific biological attributes. She believes that a woman's soft body and more pronounced beauty is a sign of her specificity and in some ways her superiority over man. Being endowed with such attributes by nature, woman has every right to take care of her beauty if she has it or use other means to improve on it. For instance, she has recourse to the Fathers of the Church to claim that a woman can dye her hair, can render her countenance appealing, by means of soft and white skin, by wearing gold jewellery, and elegant dresses. Marinelli's approach to womanhood becomes revolutionary when it is woman's intellectual capacity that is at stake. She is absolutely convinced that woman has nothing to envy man for. In many instances women, according to Marinelli, are more intelligent, have a better grasp, are sharper, if less strong physically than males.

She is able to rebut all the accusations that traditionally had been addressed against women. First of all, she shows that women are not monsters because of their imperfect bodily constitution. Using Platonic argumentation she claims that the bigger number of females and their shapelier forms are an indication of their biological superiority, rather than

inferiority, as Aristotle had put it. The Platonic aspect of this argument comes from her theory that the more beautiful we are, the more we are similar to the perfect Platonic Form which preexisted its bodily incarnation. Concerning the accusation of women being querulous, chatterboxes, vain, she is able to prove with many pertinent examples that men are as querulous and vain as women are. For instance, she gives precise instances using the rather flashy attire 'alla spagnolesca' so prevailing at the end of the 16th century. She often gives what we nowadays call sociological insights; she notices the way French men have of hanging an earring on the lobe of their ear, the tight fitting trousers and jackets worn by the Spaniards, the embroidered and expensive collars worn by well-to-do Venetians, the flashy shoes, the feathers put on men's hats, as proof of their vanity.

Marinelli is convinced that women are less violent, less prone to betraying, more respectful of religion, and more apt to keep the family's patrimony intact than men whom she blames for squandering a woman's dowry and ruining the household as a result of the widely spread habit of gambling. For a good Catholic like Marinelli, it is quite significant that of all the heretical sects not one was started by a woman. Again this shows that she is really a part of mainstream thinking. Venice was jealous of its independence but it remained a Catholic state, and Marinelli's arguments confirm this.

Marinelli can not be reduced just to being a feminist like Conti Odoriso has tried to do; she is a much more complex figure. She is certainly a defender of a feminine identity, and an

intelligent one besides. She is a good philosopher, a good poet, and a good historian, and a sharp observer of the contemporary social reality; and she is also a good Christian as several works on the life of the Virgin Mary, St. Catherine of Siena, and St. Francis of Assisi, and her comment on Tansillo's poetry show. Marinelli's place in cultural history, therefore, is quite unique. In conclusion, she is a perfect example of the rich and complex cultural identity that a learned Venetian would receive in the late 16th and early 17th century.⁸¹

1. Research for this article has been supported by funds from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

2. Ginevra Conti Odorisio, Donna e Società nel Seicento (Roma: Bulzoni, 1979) 36. N.B. All translations from Italian critical sources, unless otherwise indicated, are our own.

3. Natalia Costa-Zalessow, Scrittrici italiane dal XIII al XX secolo testi e critica (Ravenna: Longo, 1981) 14.

4. Giuseppe Passi, I donneschi difetti, (Milano: Pontion, 1599). Concerning the "devilish" nature of woman see, B. Tondi, La femina origine d'ogni male. overo Frine rimproverata, (Venezia: Brigonci, 1687). Another very critical book on women is by the German humanist Valens Acidalius, Disputatio Nova contra mulieres. qua probatur eas homines non esse (Frankfurt, 1595) See Costa-Zalessow, 139. According to Passi women have the following faults: they are "lusty, jealous, ambitious, adulterous, meretricious and whores, shameless, witches, beautiful and therefore suspicious, light-hearted, quarrelsome, hypocritical, cowardly, hateful, thieves, sharp-tongued, chatter-boxes and simulators." See Conti-Odorisio, 37. Passi's book was expanded during twenty-three years in four different editions.

5. Giovanni Scarabello, Paolo Morachiello, Guida alla civiltà di Venezia (Milano: Mondadori, 1987) See especially the first part of the volume by Scarabello dealing with Venetian history. Conti Odorisio agrees that "compared with the reality of the other states in the Italian peninsula, the fact that only in Venice the analysis of the feminine condition reached so high a level, leads to the conclusion that the prerequisites for the formulation and the birth of such a topic, existed in the Venetian culture, even though it was not supported by concrete evidence which was extremely uncomfortable for women.", 47. Conti Odorisio is convinced that

female writers, more than others, underlined the limitations of the belief in the myth of Venice as the perfect republic and as the worthy heir of ancient Rome., 48. Contrary to this claim Lucrezia Marinelli is a strong supporter in the Enrico of the myth of Venice as the new Rome. In canto 16, stanzas 58-96 are a long panegyric of the excellence of Venice. The valiant knight Rainiero, while lying wounded in bed has a vision and sees St. Mark, the patron saint of the city...In stanzas 92 and 93 the praise of Venice is most evident...Marinelli underlines again in hyperbolic terms Venice's excellence in canto 22, stanzas 12-30. Erina describes this city to Venier from a chariot being drawn through the sky by winged horses...Marinelli was sixty-four when Enrico was published. Her belief in the preeminence of the Venetian constitution is the product of her mature thinking. Her civic pride is a form of patriotism comparable to Luis de Camoes' in The Lusads. Conti Odorisio sees Marinelli only in terms of her feminism and does not therefore give a complete picture of her as a thinker and an epic poet.

6. Filippo Salvatore, Antichi e Moderni in Italia nel Seicento (Montreal: Guernica, 1987).

7. Patricia H. Labalme, "Venetian Women on Women: Three early Modern Feminists," Archivio Veneto, 117, (1981): 81-109, expands on Conti-Odorisio's book Donna e Società nel Seicento insisting on "the particular Venetian ambience that contributed to this early manifestation of female feminism". She has this to say about the content of the books published by Marinelli's father Giovanni. "Her father was a doctor, originally from Modena, who practiced in Venice and wrote a book on cosmetics and one on medicines for female infirmities. In this latter work, he provided remedies for the sexual ills which can dissolve a marriage, cures for sterility, and recommendations for pregnant women. His book on cosmetics is a compendium of recipes for the female body, including twenty-six ways to bleach hair, and advice on such matters as how to remove foot odors, whiten skin, firm up breasts and soften hands. He also edited Hippocrates and wrote works on the plague and on copiousness of speech.", 92. Giovanni Marinelli, Gli ornamenti delle donne (Franceschi Senese, 1562); Le medicine pertinenti alle infermità delle donne (Venice: Giovanni Valgriso, 1574); Hippocrates, Opera (Venice: G. Valgriso, 1575); Della copia delle parole, (Venice: Vincenzo Valgrisi, 1562); De peste. ac de pestilenti contagio liber, (Venice: Prochacino, 1577). Curzio, Lucrezia's brother wrote a book on medicine and a summary of Livy's Decades for an Italian translation, Le Deche, (Venice: Camillo Franceschini, 1581).

8. Lucrezia Marinelli, La colomba sacra poema herico (Venezia: Giovan Battista Ciotti, 1595).

9. See Costa-Zalessow, 140.

10. Luigi Tansillo, La lacreme di San Pietro, poema sacro con gli argomenti, ed allegorie di Lucrezia Marinella ed un discorso di Tommaso Costo. Giuntavi in questa nuova edizione la raccolta delle sue rime notabilmente accresciuta (Venezia: F. Piacentini, 1738).

11. Lucrezia Marinelli, L'Enrico overo Bisantio acquistato, poema heroico (Venice: G. Imberti, 1635), 647 pp.; L'Enrico, ovvero Bisanzio acquistato (Venice: Giuseppe Antonelli, 1844). For a full bibliography on Lucrezia Marinelli, see the article in the Enciclopedia Biografica e Bibliografica Italiana, VI, II, (Rome: Tasi, 1942), VI.II: 9-10.

12. Here is how Marinelli summarizes for the reader, at the beginning of her poem, the historical events: "The Supreme Pontiff, having summoned a crusade to prevent the Infidels from afflicting and persecuting the Christendom and reconquering even the Holy Sepulcher of Christ, Princes, Dukes, Counts, Knights, and Barons gathered from everywhere in the Venerable City of Venice to partake in such a noble enterprise. For the most prudent Prince Dandolo, inflamed by celestial love, had with incomparable cost readied a formidable fleet which included an awesome multitude of galleys, ships and other sorts of boats, terrifying not only because of their large number and size, but also for the amount of weapons and other military instruments they were loaded with. Prince Dandolo followed by other numerous nobles and subjects. Beaudoin, Count of Flanders, Boniface, Marquis of Monferrato, Louis, Count of Blais, and other Princes and Lords of the Church set sail from the shores of the Adriatic. But they had not gone far when they heard the mourning of Isaac's son, Emperor of Constantinople, who had been deprived of his emperial seat and of his eyesight by his brother Alexis Angelo Comnenus. Dandolo and the other princes, moved by pity and mercy, put Isaac and his son back on the throne after removing the traitor. Havine accomplished this worthy deed, they set sail again towards Palestine, when news reached them that Mirtillo, whose true name was Murcisle, had killed the young Emperor, snaring him by means of poison. As a result Dandolo landed again with his comrades-in-arms at Scutari where he fought a terrible battle against the Greeks. After being beseiged, many assaults were launched by sea and on land against the city. The army withstood the attacks of the other army, the snares were overcome, and the enemies' flames were extinguished. The impregnable walls toppled as well as the strong hearts of Thrace. After innumerable hardships, opposition, and sweat born by such a glorious commander and the mighty army, the victorious Dandolo shone as a supreme wonder in God's and the world's eyes on account of his conquest of God's greatest city."

13. Probably the best eye-witness account of the fourth crusade is the Histoire de la Conquête de Constantinople by Geoffroy de Villehardouin. He wrote a detailed report on the negotiations between the French nobility and the republic of Venice for the transportation of several thousand soldiers to the Holy Land.

Enrico Dandolo, the Venetian Doge, (1120 ca-1250), was a blind old man, almost ninety years of age, in 1202. He is the only character for whom Villehardouin feels an absolute admiration. Dandolo is referred to as being "mult sages et mult prouz" (very wise and very skillful). The first battle took place in July 1203 and by April 1204 the final assault was launched which led to the conquest of Byzantium and the fall of the Eastern Roman Empire. E. Dandolo died in 1205 and was buried in the Basilica of Santa Sophia. See Scarabello, Morachiello, 17-19.

14. The programmed novelty in lyric poetry in the Seicento is that by Giovanni Battista Marino: "the novelty of epic poetry is the one announced and indicated, proposed more than prepared, by Tasso. The structures and the themes of a long list of works in ottava rima repeat the Liberata, sometimes even in the plot and always in the topoi: a Christian knight lured by a perfidious temptress, love between heroes and heroines of opposite religions which ends up with the death in a duel, hell and heaven, angels and devils fighting each other, and a campaign of conquest with opposite armies and lofty pageantry. All writers more or less consciously, although praising this poet more than other ones, tread the same path opened by their teacher, but also feel more keenly their links with the classic models like Virgil and Homer and with the chivalrous poetry, with Orlando Furioso in particular." This is how a specialist of 17th century poetry in Italy has assessed the relationship between Tasso and other epic poets, both male and female. It is a negative judgment which seems to preclude any form of originality. Cf. Cladio Varese, "Teatro, prosa, poesia" in Storia della Letterature Italiana V, Il Seicento, (Milano: Garzanti, 1976) 700.

15. L. Marinelli, L'Enrico. (Venezia: G. Imberti, 1635) 4.

16. Marinelli, viii.

17. An even stronger negative judgment of Marinelli's Enrico and in general of her poetry is given by E. Musatti in La Donna in Venezia, (Padova: Draghi, 1891) 134. Musatti is convinced that Marinelli "wrote according to the inelegant taste of the time and her poetry consequently is lacking good taste."

18. See F. A. Della Chiesa, Teatro delle donne letterate (Mondovi: Gissandi e Rossi, 1620) 214.

19. Conti Odorisio, 51.

20. Benedetto Croce, "Donne Letterate nel Seicento", Nuovi Saggi sul Seicento, (Bari: Laterza, 1934) 159-176.

21. Costa-Zalessow, 141.

22. Lucrezia Marinelli, La Nobiltà et l'Eccellenza delle donne co'Diffetti et Mancamenti de gli Huomini (Venice: Gio. Batista Ciotti Sanese, 1601).
23. Plato, The Collected Dialogues of Plato. Including the Letters, eds. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1961).
24. For detailed analysis of these theories see Prudence Allen, RSM, The Concept of Woman: The Aristotelian Revolution (750BC-1250AD) and "The Aristotelian and Cartesian Revolutions in The Philosophy of Man and Woman", Dialogue: Canadian Philosophical Review. XXVI.2, (Summer 1987): 203-281.
25. Aristotle, Politics, in The Basic Works of Aristotle, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941) 1260a 10-15.
26. Hildegard of Bingen, Causae et Curae in Patrologia (Paris: J.P. Minge, 1844-1904) Vol 197. See also the German translation Heilkunde (Salzburg: Otto Muller Verlag, 1957), and Sr. Prudence Allen, RSM, "Hildegard's Philosophy of Sex Identity", in Thought, LXIV. 254, (September 1989) 231-241.
27. Henrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim, On the Superiority of Woman over Man, trans. Amaudin (New York: American News Company, 1873). For an analysis of texts on the superiority of woman over man see Conor Fahy, "Three Early Renaissance Treatises on Women", in Italian Studies, 11, (1956): 30-55. Please note that when a text has been translated into English and published, the English language title will be used in this article.
28. Guido Cavalcanti, Canzone d'Amore in Otto Bird, "Medieval Philosophic Thought as Reflected in the Canzone D'Amore of Cavalcanti According to the Commentary of Dino Del Barbo: Text and Commentary," diss., U. of Toronto, 1939, 7.
29. Leonardo Bruni D'Arezzo, De Studiis et Literis in William Harrison Woodward, Vittorino da Feltre and other Humanist Educators (New York: Columbia University Bureau of Publications, no. 18, 1963).
30. Petrarch's Lyric Poems: The Rime Sparce and Other Lyrics, trans. Robert M. Durling (Cambridge Mass. and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1976): 64 and 556.
31. Giovanni Boccaccio, Thirteen Most Pleasant and Delectable Questions of love (Filocolo). Trans. Henry Carter (New York: Clarkson K. Potter, 1974) 91, 142; The Decameron, trans. Mark Musa and Peter Bondanella (New York and Scarborough: New American Library, 1982) 632; and Concerning Famous Women, trans. Guido A. Guarino (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1963) xxxvii.

32. Marsilio Ficino Commentary on Plato's Symposium on Love, trans. Sears Jayne (Dallas, Texas: Spring Publications, Inc., 1985).
33. Leone Ebreo, "On Love and Desire: A Dialogue between Philo and Sophia" , Renaissance Philosophy: Volume I: The Italian Philosophers, eds. Arturo Fallico and Herman Shapiro (New York: Modern Library Edition, 1967) 172-3.
34. Allesandro Piccolomini, Raffaella: A Dialogue of the Fair Perfecting of Ladies, trans. J.N. (Glasgow: University Press, 1968); Giuseppe Betussi La Leonora in Trattati d'amore del Cinquecento (Bari: Gius. Laterza and Figli, 1912); and Lodovico Domenichi Dialoghi (Ferrara: Gabriel Giolito, 1621) and La Nobiltà della donne (Ferrara: Gabriel Giolito, 1551).
35. Baldesar Castiglione The Book of the Courtier, trans. Charles Singleton (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1959) 213-4. Again we note that when a foreign text has been published in English, the English language title will be used.
36. Pietro Bembo, Gli Asolani (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1954) 22.
37. Jacopo Filippo Foresti da Bergamo, De claris mulieribus (Paris: Colinaei, 1521); Maphaeus Vegius, Laudasis De Educatione Liberorum et Moribus Libri Sex in Sr. Maria Fanning, Catholic University Dissertation Series, Books I-III, 1933 and Sr. Anne Sullivan, Catholic University Dissertation Series, Books IV-VI, 1936; and Pompeo Colonna, Apologiae mulierum libri II in Studi e Ricerche Sull'umanesimo Italiano, ed. Guglielmo Sappacosto (Bergamo: Ecc., 1972). See also Conor Fahy, "Three Early Renaissance Treatises on Women", Italian Studies 11 (1956) 30-55. In addition to an analysis of De Laudibus Mulierum by Bartolomeo Gogio, De Mulieribus by Mario Equicola, and Defensio Mulierum by Agostino Strozzi, this article contains a bibliography of 41 works on the equality or superiority of women written or published in Italy during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.
38. Angelo Pandolfini Il trattato del governo della famiglia (Milan: Giuseppe Ripamonti Carpano, 1805); Francesco Barbaro De re uxoria, (Directions for Love and Marriage) (London: John Leigh in Fleetstreet, 1677); and Leone Battista Alberti I Libri Della Famiglia in The Family in Renaissance Florence, trans. Renée Watkins (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1969).
39. Christine de Pisan, The Book of The City of Ladies, trans. Earl Jeffrey Richards (New York: Persea Books, 1983), 3-4.
40. Isotae Nogarolae Veronensis Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia (Budapest: Vindobonae apud Gerold et Socios, 1886), II, 228- 231.

41. Cassandra Fidelis, Epistolae et orationes (Francifica Bolzettam, 1636); Vittoria Colonna, Gaspara Stampa, and Veronica Gambara in Rime di tre gentildonne del secolo XVI (Milano, 1930); Le Piu belle pagine di Gaspare Stampa, Vittoria Colonna, Veronica Gambaro, Isabella Morra (Milano, Treves, 1935); and Rime e lettere di Veronica Gambara (Firenze: G. Barbera, 1879)
42. Isabella Sforza, Della vera tranquillità dell' animo (Rome: 1544); Tullia d'Aragona, Della infinità d'amore in Trattati d'amore del cinquecento (Bari, 1912).
43. Marinelli, La Nobiltà: the title page of text. Translated by Filippo Salvatore as are all other passages from this text.
44. Marinelli, La Nobiltà 1.
45. Marinelli, La Nobiltà 2.
46. Marinelli, La Nobiltà 2.
47. Marinelli, La Nobiltà 4.
48. Marinelli, La Nobiltà 6.
49. Marinelli, La Nobiltà 6.
50. Marinelli, La Nobiltà 8.
51. Marinelli, La Nobiltà 8.
52. Marinelli, La Nobiltà 10.
53. Marinelli, La Nobiltà 11.
54. Marinelli, La Nobiltà 11.
55. Marinelli, La Nobiltà 23-24.
56. Marinelli, La Nobiltà 25.
57. Marinelli, La Nobiltà 25.
58. Marinelli, La Nobiltà 28. There are long passages in Latin from Aristotle to support each claim that she makes. These have been deleted from the text.
59. Marinelli, La Nobiltà 32-33.
60. Marinelli, La Nobiltà 33.
61. Marinelli, La Nobiltà 39-40.

62. Marinelli, La Nobiltà 40-41.
63. Marinelli, La Nobiltà 42.
64. Marinelli, La Nobiltà 108.
65. Marinelli, La Nobiltà 109-110.
66. Marinelli, La Nobiltà 119.
67. Marinelli, La Nobiltà 119.
68. Marinelli, La Nobiltà 137.
69. Marinelli, La Nobiltà 120.
70. Marinelli, La Nobiltà 129.
71. Marinelli, La Nobiltà 129.
72. Marinelli, La Nobiltà 121-122.
73. Marinelli, La Nobiltà 123-124.
74. Marinelli, La Nobiltà 126-127.
75. Marinelli, La Nobiltà 127.
76. Marinelli, La Nobiltà 127-128.
77. Marinelli, La Nobiltà 129-130.
78. Marinelli, La Nobiltà 132.
79. Marinelli, La Nobiltà 133.
80. The view of this author that Aristotle was right about human identity in general and wrong about woman has been defended in detail in The Concept of Woman: The Aristotelian Revolution.
81. For some interesting details about the attitudes towards proper attire for men and the exuberant and flashy way of dressing by Venetian women see, P.J. Labalme, 94-96, 101.